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LOOK AT LINCOLN: Lincoln Evolved as War Neared Its Close

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Feature Essay

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Williams, Frank J. *LOOK AT LINCOLN: Lincoln Evolved as War Neared Its Close.*

Lincoln and the Military

by John F. Marszalek

Publisher: Southern Illinois University Press

Retail Price: \$24.95

ISBN: 978080933622

Lincoln and the War's End

by John C. Waugh

Publisher: Southern Illinois University Press

Retail Price: \$24.95

ISBN: 9780809333516

These latest offerings from the wonderful Concise Lincoln Library series of Southern Illinois University Press serve as temporary bookends within the series. In full disclosure, I provided *Lincoln as Hero* as one of the 16 volumes published to date.

John F. Marszalek, the biographer of classic volumes on William T. Sherman and Henry W. Halleck, presents in his new book a highly readable account of Abraham Lincoln's military leadership which evolved from his initial inept insistence that the Federal forces attack Confederates at Manassas.

Marszalek's biography of Halleck provides a good beginning point as the author describes Commander-in-Chief Lincoln and his relations with his generals. The end result was the creation of a modern command system with the President as Commander-in-Chief, Halleck as Chief of Staff, and Ulysses S. Grant as General-in-Chief. Before this occurred, Lincoln had to learn on the job.

While Lincoln's military experience was limited to 90 days' service in the Illinois Militia during the Black Hawk War in 1832, it should not be underestimated as William C. ("Jack") Davis demonstrates in his *Lincoln's Men: How President Lincoln Became Father to an Army and a Nation*. For example, Lincoln learned how to deal with volunteers, short rations, and late pay.

The President became severely disappointed with West Point professionals on whom he had relied; so much so, that he was forced to take the reins himself including a check on the General-in-Chief when Ulysses S. Grant assumed command in March 1864.

But Lincoln did find his general in Grant, who understood his role as subordinate to civilian leadership. The President was able to create a winning team that wore down the Confederacy and led to final victory in 1865.

This short and telling account of Lincoln's military leadership emphasizes his resilience and empathy. A better introduction, among the 65,000 books published to date on the Civil War, cannot be found except in its equal, *Lincoln and the War's End* by master storyteller John C. Waugh.

In a mere 136 pages, Waugh describes the last five months of the Civil War in dramatic fashion with an almost day-to-day account from Lincoln's re-election in November 1864, which General Ulysses S. Grant described as "...a victory more than a battle won...", to Appomattox in April 1865.

The historical events covered range from Lincoln's last annual message to Congress in December 1864 that made clear that despite peace talks at any price and efforts to derail emancipation, the war would continue until final victory on

the battlefield and a change to the Constitution (with the 13th Amendment) were accomplished. After that, the Amendment was finally passed by the Senate at the end of January 1865 and on March 4, the President delivered his Second Inaugural Address containing only 703 words. Considered the best presidential inaugural address ever, it was neither a victory speech, nor a scolding of the South for the war. Instead, slavery was posited for causing the Civil War and justice could only come through peace and reconciliation. On April 4, he visited the Confederate capital in Richmond, which was still burning after the city's surrender. On April 9, General Robert E. Lee surrendered his Army of Northern Virginia at Appomattox Court House. Lincoln finally witnessed victory after his fourth arduous year as chief magistrate.

The book also provides stirring accounts of the final military campaigns, including General William T. Sherman's Georgia march to Savannah and the defeat of General John Bell Hood's army outside of Nashville (only the second Confederate Army to that date to disintegrate; the other was Confederate General Pendleton's Army at Vicksburg on July 4, 1863). Sherman's march through the Carolinas and the burning of Columbia, South Carolina, as well as Grant's final campaign in spring 1865 at Five Forks, made clear that the end was near.

With fitting quotes from many participants during the era, including George Templeton Strong, Mary Boykin Chestnut, and Lincoln's secretaries—John Nicolay and John Hay—the narrative comes alive. The author uses beautiful prose based on his expertise and research.

Readers are sure to learn from reading both volumes.

Frank J. Williams is the Chair of the Lincoln Forum and author of Lincoln as Hero, and is a contributing columnist for the Civil War Sesquicentennial.